

Letter campaign questions Loop 202

By Doug Murphy

April 27, 2007 - 1:02PM

Is the pen mightier than the earth mover?

The Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee may soon find out when it sends out a batch of letters underlining its opposition to the South Mountain Loop 202 on Pecos Road and asking some hard-hitting questions about how construction and operation of the freeway will impact the community.

The letters will go to elected officials from Councilman Greg Stanton all the way up the line to U.S. senators Jon Kyl and John McCain, reiterating the committee's concerns over a 10-lane freeway where Pecos Road now is, and supporting efforts to seek an alternative route, including south on the Gila River Indian Community.

Committee members admitted that some of the questions that will go to local and state officials may not have an answer at this point in the planning process, but committee members agreed they wanted to make sure the questions were asked and placed on record. Since 2002 the Arizona Department of Transportation has been conducting a study of the old 1988 Loop 202 route from Interstate 10 and Pecos Road in Ahwatukee Foothills, through South Mountain Park and reconnecting with I-10 near 55th Avenue.

Some of the questions that were collected from residents and planning committee members will be sent out in the next week and include:

- How will homeowners in the Foothills Reserve neighborhood, west of 27th Avenue, get in and out since Pecos Road is the way in?
- Will the park-and-ride lot at 40th Street and Pecos Road exist after the freeway is constructed?
- Will the freeway affect the post office at Desert Foothills Parkway?
- What impact will diesel truck exhaust have on students and residents at the schools and homes along the route?

The letters come at a time when the Maricopa Association of Governments, which is responsible for freeway planning in the Valley, is growing frustrated at the long delay in finalizing the environmental study.

But Councilman Greg Stanton pointed out that delays aren't bad.

"Let's take our time and do it right," he told the Village Planning Committee Monday night.

A draft letter to Gov. Janet Napolitano, which MAG decided to hold until next month, says that the alternative to constructing the South Mountain Loop 202 would be to displace homes and businesses to widen I-10. MAG called that alternative unacceptable.

But freeway opponents say that the same thing will happen if the freeway is built along Pecos Road, with at least 255 homes demolished according to ADOT, since the size of the freeway is wider than originally designed and some homes were built in the right of way years ago.

One area where both MAG and the planning committee seem to agree is to encourage construction south of Pecos Road on the Gila River Indian Community and encouraging Napolitano to get involved, although the tribe has shown little interest in accommodating the freeway on its land.

All letters sent by the planning committee and the draft MAG letter include support for elected officials to work with the Gila River Indian Community on potential alignments.

The letters give the city and state 90 days to respond with answers to the questions, which could be discussed at the planning committee's August meeting.

Doug Murphy can be reached at (480) 898-7914 or dmurphy@aztrib.com.